

# DOC H'S BLOG

## Postings about standards, assessment and accountability

November 20, 2009

### Assessments and Common Core Standards

This week's blog begins a conversation on development of assessments to support the [national common core standards](#).

The conversation about common core standards developed due to states coming together to address the concerns of many parents, legislators and business leaders about the wide variability in the academic standards across the states. The common comparison tool was the [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#) (NAEP). The results of this assessment were used to correlate the level of proficiency on state tests compared to the NAEP level of proficiency. States that had large gaps were said to have lower standards.

In order to remove this debate, the states and National Governors Association (NGA) collaborated on the common core standards movement. If the debate on standards is valid, then it would seem to follow that states develop common core assessments. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has set aside \$350 million for this work. The timeline for states to access this funding will probably include a March application deadline and funding availability in June 2010. Kentucky will certainly apply for this funding and be involved in this process. Our position is strong, since we will adopt the common core standards in February, and Senate Bill 1 requires our development of new assessments.

A couple of issues are coming up for discussion. One issue deals with consortia of states who might apply for funding to develop assessments. Why would we have five to ten consortia competing against each other when the final product should be a common core assessment available to each state? Why would we develop a national assessment and then continue to have NAEP administered? Is this not a waste of time and money? I would think that NAEP would need to be revised to match the expectations from the common core standards. Should the new assessment not be benchmarked against international competition? Should the assessments not include levels of formative assessment to help inform instruction?

The answers to these questions will drive the final product. The U.S. Department of Education is currently holding [national feedback sessions](#) prior to developing guidance for the application process for assessment dollars. As with any organization, it is what is measured that eventually gains the most attention.

Education is a national defense, moral, civil rights and economic issue. We must make certain that this assessment process has strong support from every stakeholder and that we can ensure the results are valid and reliable predictors of success for individual students, schools, school districts, states and our education system.

**December 11, 2009**

### **A New Direction for the Kentucky Board of Education**

The Kentucky Board of Education meeting this week signaled a new direction for the board's meetings. The agenda items at the meeting were a comprehensive set of strategies that will eventually lead to regulatory and possibly statutory changes to implement Senate Bill 1.

The board acted on major recommendations from a recent Office of Education Accountability study of mathematics programs in schools in the Commonwealth. A key requirement will be common course codes for core subjects. This is related to Senate Bill 1, since the Common Core Standards (an initiative of the Council of Chief State School Officers and the National Governors Association) will drive the need to have common course codes at the high school level. Algebra I in Paducah must be the same as Algebra I in Pikeville. While we would certainly want local teachers to set instructional materials, pacing and length of course and define instruction, we must assure parents and students that our mathematics courses and standards will adequately prepare all high school graduates to be successful in college and career.

Another key strategy is changing the definition for measuring high school graduation rates. The board approved regulatory changes that will allow use of a more standard graduation rate, which allows districts to disaggregate rates by ethnicity and gender. Kentucky will not be able to implement the national graduation rate, called a cohort graduation rate, which follows individual students from the 9th grade to graduation, until 2013-14; however, until that time, we must focus on preparing ALL children to graduate with the skills needed for college and career.

These are very exciting times in Kentucky. With the Race to the Top application and Senate Bill 1 deployment, the Kentucky Board of Education is very focused on a comprehensive system of improvement. Also, with Governor Steve Beshear's Transforming Education in Kentucky Task Force set to begin work in January, 2010 should be a very interesting year for education. What excites me more than anything are the great teachers, principals and school staff that I see during visits to schools each week. In spite of budget cuts and challenging local situations, these folks are dedicated to helping every child be successful.

**February 12, 2010**

## **Common Core State Standards**

This week, Kentucky took bold steps toward improving education outcomes for the future of our Commonwealth – our children.

Gov. Steve Beshear enabled Kentucky's participation in the development of [Common Core State Standards](#) with his signature last year on an agreement that states develop common core standards. This collaborative effort of 51 states and territories, many national organizations, the National Governors Association, the Council of Chief State School Officers, Achieve, ACT, ETS and others signaled a major step in placing America back in the front of educational attainment in the world.

By any measure you care to review, our education system has continued to achieve; however, we have been outpaced by most of the industrialized world. We no longer lead the world in high school graduates or postsecondary graduates, and on most international assessments, our student achievement scores place our education system well below the international average. There are many causes of this change in our relative position; however, the most obvious is that the rest of the world finally caught on to America's advantage – education.

Our state leadership recognized that Kentucky needed to not only compare districts and schools in Kentucky to each other, but also recognized the need for international and national comparisons. If Singapore outperforms U.S. students in mathematics, then we need to look at what they are doing in Singapore. When we looked, we found what teachers have been telling us for years. We were expecting too much to be taught. This meant that teachers covered material rather than helping every child master the material. Our focus on multiple-choice testing has led us to actually “dumb down” the curriculum and assess mostly recall and short-term memory items. Our practices across education in Kentucky and throughout the U.S. focused more on “gaming” the testing and accountability system rather than really focusing on student mastery of high-level material.

This week, the [Kentucky Board of Education](#), [Council on Postsecondary Education](#) and [Education Professional Standards Board](#) came together to signal the change in direction as required by Senate Bill 1 and the Common Core State Standards movement. While this is a bold move, it will not have any impact on classrooms unless we continue to engage teachers and college faculty in the next steps.

During the review of the Common Core Standards, hundreds of college and P-12 faculty were involved in the review. Comments from Kentucky were widely utilized by the national writing teams. The next steps now must include every mathematics and language arts teacher in Kentucky. We have a deployment plan that will engage selected faculty this summer and then engage all math and language arts teachers during the 2010-11 school year.

We are scheduling a statewide summit in early April to roll out the plan, and we will then keep the public and legislative leaders informed of our progress through a Web-based project management plan. The plan ensures the level of engagement, professional development and public awareness that will be necessary to make certain every parent and every businessperson in Kentucky knows why we are implementing the Common Core Standards. The main reason – our children. A young person who graduates from a Kentucky high school should know that he/she is prepared for college and/or career based on his/her choice. We must eliminate the need for high school graduates to pay for remediation courses for which they do not receive college credit.

The responsibility will be a shared responsibility. Teachers must address the needs of ALL students, students must be held accountable for individual progress, and parents must be involved in supporting schools and their children. The future is in all of our hands, and my few months in Kentucky have convinced me that Kentucky teachers, students and parents can rise to challenge.

You can see more information about the historic meeting on Feb. 10 [here](#).

**March 26, 2010**

## **Focusing on Post-High School Life and Achievement Gaps**

Recently, I attended the annual legislative meeting of the [Council of Chief State School Officers](#) (CCSSO) in Washington, D.C. We spent time talking about our responses to the [Blueprint for Reauthorization](#) of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). As Kentucky's Education Commissioner, I took time while in D.C. to drop by the offices of our senators and met with Rep. Brett Guthrie, who serves on the House Education, Labor and Pensions subcommittee where the ESEA will be reviewed. I wanted to personally let him and the committee members know of my support for several key components of the legislation reauthorization plan.

The two major components I support are the change of adequate yearly progress (AYP) from an all-or-none proficiency rate to a focus on more students graduating from high school who are ready for college and career. The other component is the continued strong focus on closing gaps between student groups.

In Kentucky, we have [Senate Bill 1](#) and other legislation that focus our work on both of these goals. We are required to reduce the college remediation rate by 50 percent by 2014. This translates into more students graduating high school ready for college. [Currently](#), the percentages of Kentucky high school juniors ready for college in the four areas measured by ACT - English, mathematics, reading and science - are low. The numbers range from more than 40 percent ready in reading to 16 percent ready in science, with fewer than 21 percent ready for college-level algebra.

The overall readiness is a concern, and the gaps also are a concern. If we look closely at the data, we find gaps between white students and other student groups. While we did receive some [great news](#) this week that our [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#) (NAEP) scores are improving, we continue to have large gaps between whites and other student groups.

This week, the Commissioner's Raising Achievement and Closing Gaps Committee met to work on possible recommendations for an accountability model that will focus Kentucky schools and districts on proficiency rates, growth rates and closing gap rates. The early work of the committee recommends a state report card that provides parents and other interested stakeholders with access to information that is easy to read, with depths of data about how well all student groups are doing with proficiency, growth and closing gaps on state assessments, graduation rates and college readiness rates. Hopefully, based on that data, schools and districts would then make certain that all of the student groups receive a focus on growth, proficiency and closing gaps.

The recommendations will be presented to the Accountability Task Force, various advisory councils and eventually to the Kentucky Board of Education. The Kentucky Department of Education is required to have a new accountability process in place by the 2011-12 school year. It appears that our work around readiness and closing gaps will align closely with the reauthorization of ESEA. These are exciting times in Kentucky.

**April 9, 2010**

## **Assessment Plans for Kentucky**

[Senate Bill 1](#) requires development of new standards in language arts, mathematics, science and social studies by December 2010. As of today, we have been able to partner with 48 other states to develop internationally benchmarked standards in language arts and mathematics.

Kentucky was the first state to adopt the standards, and work begins on April 12 to unpack the standards and begin to translate them into teacher-friendly tools that should help guarantee a strong curriculum in every classroom in Kentucky. We also are in conversation with national leaders who are working on science standards; however, we do not anticipate those standards being completed until 2012. Due to the complicated nature of social studies standards, we are continuing to explore possible partnerships with other states.

Our attention now turns to development of summative and formative assessments based on the [Common Core Academic Standards](#). The federal [Race to the Top](#) (RTTT) funds provided \$350 million for this work. This week, the [U.S. Department of Education](#) released [guidelines](#) for states who are interested in applying for the funds. There are two categories of funding.

Category 1 addresses states who want to develop assessments in language arts and mathematics for grades 3-8 and high school (one assessment). States may apply for up to \$160 million. The guidelines require a minimum of 15 states for a consortium, with five states serving as governing states. States also may work as design states and/or partnering states. In joining a consortium, states agree to implement the assessments, and the assessments would meet all requirements of No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Currently, there are two excellent consortia, and Kentucky is a member of both. However, we may only belong to one consortium, and we have to make a decision on membership within the next few weeks. Kentucky teachers would be heavily involved over the next few years in the development of assessment items and field testing the items from other states, regardless of which consortium we join.

The second category for funding is for development of high school course assessments. Again, Kentucky is well-positioned for this work. The Kentucky Board of Education has provided direction for [end-of-course assessments](#). Senate Bill 1 provided end-of-course assessments as an option. Funding from the RTTT grants is up to \$30 million. Through our partnership with the [National Center on Education and the Economy](#), we will apply for these funds to assist in the adaption of existing international assessments to meet requirements of the grant.

Based on the guidelines, we believe that Kentucky will be a member of a funded consortium for both grants. However, we will encounter difficulties with Senate Bill 1 deadlines. We are scheduled to have an assessment ready by spring 2012. Under the funding guidelines, the new NCLB common core assessments would not be ready until the 2014-15 school year. The high school end-of-course assessments could be ready as soon as 2012.

Once the General Assembly session ends, we will meet with key legislators and the [Interim Joint Committee on Education](#) to seek guidance on the interim period. We hope to have clarity on this issue by the June-July state conferences. So ... the good news is that the cost of development should be provided by the Race to the Top funding. The bad news is that the Senate Bill 1 deadlines may be a concern.

Our goal for state assessments is to provide formative assessment items throughout the year that are open-response, problem-solving and higher-order thinking types of assessment. We will provide standard scoring rubrics or allow school districts to develop and validate their own assessments. The summative assessments will be primarily multiple choice and constructed response. We are hoping to have a plan to score regionally and/or locally and provide feedback on assessments in a much shorter period than current practice. Reaching this goal will depend on our ability to gain funding for deployment. We have great leadership at KDE with the Office of Assessment and Accountability's Associate Commissioner Ken Draut and the assessment team. Couple that with the terrific leadership of the district assessment coordinators, and Kentucky is in great shape for the future.

**April 23, 2010**

## **Vision for Education Reform in Kentucky**

Governor Beshear will soon be appointing up to seven new members for the [Kentucky Board of Education](#). The Governor also has appointed a [Transforming Education in Kentucky \(TEK\) Task Force](#) to make recommendations prior to the 2011 legislative session. Also, KDE is working hard to implement 2009's [Senate Bill 1](#) (SB 1), which requires a new accountability system, internationally benchmarked standards, formative and diagnostic assessments, student growth measures, and numerous other far-reaching initiatives.

I have started the process of engaging all advisory councils in the dialogue concerning a new accountability system and strategic plan for the Kentucky Board of Education. The board will hold a strategic retreat prior to its June meeting. The following information is a summary of what I have been proposing to our advisory groups and will provide to the board as a guide for the development of a revised accountability system and strategic plan.

The key to our success in transforming education in Kentucky will reside in our ability to focus on a few goals with a few strategies that are done with precision and fidelity. These few goals will focus on the vision of every child proficient and prepared for success. This vision will be measured by indicators of proficiency, growth and closing gaps among student groups.

Proficiency will be measured by the cohort graduation rate and our comparative position among states. Growth will be measured by the increases in our annual percentage of high school graduates who are prepared for college and career as compared against other states. Closing gaps will be measured by the decreases in gaps for the graduation and readiness rates among student groups in Kentucky as compared against other states.

The ultimate measure for the vision of Kentucky education will be informed by the following measures:

- [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#) (NAEP) Proficiency, Growth and Gap rates – 4th- and 8th-grade reading and mathematics
- [Educational Planning and Assessment System](#) (EPAS) Proficiency, Growth and Gap rates – 8th-grade EXPLORE, 10th-grade PLAN and 11th-grade ACT

The Kentucky Board of Education will set biannual goals for each of the measures to reach and maintain a top 20 in the nation ranking.

There will be four strategic priorities with specific strategies and annual indicators of progress. These priorities, strategies and indicators are based on federal guidance provided by [Race to the Top](#), [State Fiscal Stabilization Funds](#) and proposed reauthorization of [Elementary and Secondary Education Act](#) (ESEA). Also, the priorities, strategies and indicators are based on state guidance provided by SB 1 (2009), [SB 168](#) (2002), [SB 130](#) (2006) and other state statutes.



The priorities are Next Generation Learners, Next Generation Professionals, Next Generation Support Systems and Next Generation Schools and Districts.

Comments and suggestions concerning this vision for the new accountability system are very much appreciated. We will have community forums and focus groups as part of the Governor's TEK Task Force in August, and all advisory councils (parents, teachers, business, superintendents, principals, students and others) will have opportunity for input.

Our board has a vision of ALL children proficient and prepared for success. While visions are great, they have no meaning unless you have measures and accountability for those.

**April 30, 2010**

### **Priorities for School and District Accountability**

Last week I shared the vision for the state strategic plan and the goals and measures for the state. This week, I am sharing the vision for a new accountability system and school/district report cards.

There will be four strategic priorities with specific strategies and annual indicators of progress. These priorities, strategies and indicators are based on federal guidance provided by Race to the Top, State Fiscal Stabilization Funds and proposed reauthorization of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). The priorities, strategies and indicators also are based on state guidance provided by 2009's [Senate Bill 1](#) , 2002's Senate Bill 168 (KRS [158.649](#)) , 2006's Senate Bill 130 (KRS [158.6453](#)) and other state statutes.

Over the coming year, we will begin working with advisory groups to more clearly define the district and school indicators that are reflected in the table below. There is much work to do in defining the new common core assessments that are due by 2012. We must define growth to the student level and match with classrooms and schools. Also, we must develop an index that reflects school and district performance in closing gaps among groups of students. Perhaps one of largest challenges is clearly defining what "career-ready" means.

We are excited to announce that the Teacher and Principal Working Conditions Survey will be initiated in the spring of 2011, and [Program Reviews](#) will be piloted in 2010-11. With support from Race to the Top funding, we hope to be able to develop clear definitions of effective teachers and leaders with the support of steering committees comprised of teachers, leaders and other partners.

Finally, we will revise district and school report cards to match the indicators in the strategic plan.

This is multi-year work and will require a tremendous amount of collaboration between all partners. However, with fewer priorities (four), very clear strategies (six) and indicators that are aligned between state and federal requirements through our strategic plan, I feel very confident that we can meet and exceed the expectations of Kentucky citizens.

Through Senate Bill 1, citizens have mandated that we must have a greater percentage of high school graduates prepared for college and career. Failure to meet this goal impacts our state economy; however, even more importantly, failure to meet this goal impacts the lives of our children.

### Proposed Strategic Plan Components for 2010-2014 Kentucky P-12 Education

| Strategic Priorities                  | Strategies  | Indicators  |
|---------------------------------------|---|---|
| Next-Generation Learners              | Common Core Standards and Balanced Assessments                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• proficiency, growth and gap rates in literacy, numeracy, science and social studies on common core assessment</li> <li>• career readiness</li> </ul> |
| Next-Generation Professionals         | Effective Teachers and Leaders                                      | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• percent of effective teachers</li> <li>• percent of effective leaders</li> </ul>   |
| Next-Generation Support Systems       | Data Systems That Inform Instruction and Policy Decisions           | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Working Conditions Survey</li> <li>• Program Reviews</li> </ul>  |
| Next-Generation Schools and Districts | Turn Around Low-Achieving Schools                                   | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• effective schools and districts per state report card</li> </ul>   |
|                                       | Create Innovative Schools and Programs for Next-Generation Learning |   |

**May 7, 2010**

### **Value-Added Systems and Accountability**

Those who are following news articles about [Race to the Top](#) or other education communications know there is a great deal of debate about holding teachers and principals accountable for student test scores. I have gone on record that I could never support a teacher or principal evaluation system that was solely based on the results of student test scores on a one-day, one-time test.

I recently reviewed an excellent report from the National Academy of Science workshop called "Getting Value Out of Value Added." I encourage you to read the full report at <http://www.nap.edu/catalog/12820.html>. (The report is available as a free download.)

This report focuses on the value-added concept, but also provides an excellent overview of the current state of testing and accountability in the assessment world. There are several models of assessment:

- Status Model – this model is a snapshot at a certain point in time and answers questions such as "What percentage of students are meeting state proficiency standards?"
- Cohort-to-Cohort Model – this model compares one group of students against another group of students. "How are 4th graders doing this year as compared to 4th graders last year?"
- Growth Model – this model usually shows growth from year to year for individual students, classrooms and schools. There is usually a developmental growth scale that is the basis for measuring growth. I am very familiar with this model, since it was utilized in North Carolina and South Carolina, where I served as superintendent and testing coordinator.
- Value-Added Model – Tennessee probably has the best example of a value-added model. This model attempts to answer the questions around how much value a particular teacher, school or program added to a student's or group of students' performance.

There are MANY yet unanswered issues and problems with all of the models. The report cited several concerns with value-added models.

Some research findings focused, for example, on problems with the tests that provide the raw data for value-added analyses; others were concerned with technical aspects of different value-added approaches, especially with sources of bias and imprecision; and still others focused on issues of transparency and public understanding of the results. Some of the concerns, such as the fact that tests are incomplete measures of student achievement, are general problems that arise. The major concern with value-added models is the inability of principals and schools to randomly assign students to teachers.

In Kentucky, our approach to the development teacher and principal effectiveness measures will be led by groups of practitioners and other stakeholders. As commissioner, I am appointing a steering committee for the teacher and principal effectiveness work. These groups will begin work very soon to manage the pilot process that we have been developing this year through support from the Wallace Foundation. Eventually, we hope to work closely with the General Assembly to make any necessary statutory changes and with the [Education Professional Standards Board](#) and [Kentucky Board of Education](#) to make appropriate regulatory changes. Our intent is to develop a statewide system of evaluation that is a valid, fair and reliable measure of teacher and principal effectiveness. We also hope to continue to work with our partners to develop superintendent and school board effectiveness measures.

While Race to the Top is currently driving this conversation, we also have [State Fiscal Stabilization Funds](#), [Title I](#), [Title II](#), [School Improvement Grants](#) and other competitive programs pushing this conversation. We are NOT rushing into methods that could turn out to be unfair and not valid measures of effectiveness. We ARE heavily involving stakeholders in the development of the process, and we hope that Race to the Top will provide the funding to develop an outstanding effectiveness process that would lead to more children proficient and prepared for success.

**August 6, 2010**

## **Planning for Proficiency**

This week, the [Kentucky Board of Education](#) (KBE) reviewed progress toward the vision of “every child proficient and prepared for success.” The board presentation “The Good, the Bad, the Ugly” may be found ([insert link and put presentation on my web page](#)). To summarize from the presentation:

- There is good progress in 4th- and 8th-grade reading, with Kentucky outpacing the nation and also being the only state with significant gains between 2007 and 2009 [National Assessment of Educational Progress](#) (NAEP) scores.
- Over the last decade, Kentucky also has made good progress in improving graduation rates; however, as we move toward the cohort graduation rate, we will see a decline in those rates.
- We are not making as much progress with 4th- and 8th-grade math on NAEP, with Kentucky scores being at or below national average.
- The real concerns continue to be with the persistent achievement gaps between groups of students at all levels for every indicator.

The KBE gave support for the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) to begin implementation of the proposed strategic plan. The plan will have four strategic priorities – Next-Generation Learners; Next-Generation Professionals; Next-Generation Support Systems; and Next-Generation Schools and Districts. The KBE gave me direction to develop specific measureable goals for my evaluation and, in turn, the evaluation of the department.

It is now time to turn our attention to finalizing how schools and districts will be measured under the proposed strategic plan. We have been conducting advisory group meetings to gain feedback on revisions to the Kentucky accountability model and school/district report cards. The proposed accountability model would include the following measures:

- Next-Generation Learners – schools and district will receive an A,B,C,D or F grade on student learning results based on new common core assessments. The grade would be derived from a composite of proficiency rates, closing gaps and growth. Middle schools would have a high school readiness component added based on the 8th-grade PLAN assessment. High schools would have a college readiness component and a graduation component added.
- Next-Generation Professionals – schools and districts will receive a grade based on percentage of effective teachers and leaders. This measure will be developed by the teacher and principal effectiveness steering committees.
- Next-Generation Support Systems – schools and districts will receive a grade based on results from the teacher/leader working conditions survey to be administered for the first time in spring 2011. Also, program review performance will be included to ensure schools and districts are continuing to focus on a complete education in addition to tested subjects.

- Next-Generation Schools/Districts – within this strategic priority, districts will be graded on percentage of schools they have at each grading level. Also, school report cards will be revised to show performance on the above measures.

Let me reiterate that the new report cards and accountability system are only PROPOSED at this point. We are gaining feedback from all stakeholders; however, the time for action by the Kentucky Board of Education is drawing close. The KBE will receive a draft proposal at the October board meeting, and a final vote will be taken at the December board meeting. Should legislation be required for any component, we will work with legislators during the 2011 short session.

We do anticipate the reauthorization of the federal [Elementary and Secondary Education Act](#) (ESEA) next spring, and we anticipate the revisions to ESEA will contain many of the components we are proposing in the Kentucky model. Also, 2009's Senate Bill 1 ([KRS 158.6453](#)) required the KBE to develop and implement a new accountability model by the 2011-12 school year – thus, the reason for the timeline.

Thanks for reading this blog, and remember that the driving force behind all of this work is “every child proficient and prepared for success.” A vision without work is just a dream. We are working to make the dream a reality!

**August 20, 2010**

### **College- and Career-Ready Students: More Work to Do**

Last week, I highlighted projections for the Class of 2010. This week, I want to do a follow-up concerning the [results](#) of the ACT for the Class of 2010.

I know many of you heard reports this week that fewer than one in four high school graduates across the nation met benchmarks for college readiness. Through this blog, I hope to explain what those benchmarks measure.

Kentucky is one of a few states that require all 8th, 10th and 11th graders to take the components of ACT, Inc.'s [Educational Planning and Assessment System](#) (EPAS). In 8th grade, students take the [EXPLORE](#) assessment, and then in 10th grade they take the [PLAN](#) assessment. At 11th grade, students actually take the ACT. EPAS reports results at each grade level showing whether or not students are scoring at the college-ready level for the specific grade. The reports are based on assessments of English, mathematics, reading and science.

At the 11th grade, the benchmark scores predict that a student has a 75 percent chance of making a C or better in a college entry-level course such as English 101, College Algebra, College Social Science and/or College Biology. Each subject-level component of the ACT has a separate benchmark score. ACT also reports on the percentage of students who score college-ready for all four areas. This is what is often reported in the media. Nationwide, 24 percent of students met benchmarks for all four areas. In Kentucky, 14 percent did.

Readers need to know a couple of things as they interpret the scores. Kentucky's scores include all public school 11th-grade students. Most states do NOT assess all students, and the percentage assessed can range from 100 percent to less than 4 percent, depending on the state. In 2006, only 24,930 Kentucky 11th graders took the ACT, compared to 41,227 in 2010. So, comparing results from 2006 to 2010 is not appropriate, and comparing Kentucky results to other states who have significantly smaller numbers of students taking the ACT is inappropriate.

However, as Commissioner of Education, I am extremely concerned for our state and our nation. As I reported last week, our state's and nation's futures are tied to our level of education due to the increasing demands for higher levels of skills by employers. From 1970, when more than 80 percent of jobs in our state and nation only required a high school degree or less, we are now moving toward an economy that will have 80 percent of jobs that require training beyond high school, and 63 percent of those jobs will require a postsecondary degree. The ACT demonstrates one measure that reveals we have a large gap in our high school graduates' readiness for college and career.

Another component of the ACT results that is worrisome to me is the HUGE gap between white students and African American students in our public schools.



- In English, 56 percent of white students met the benchmark, and only 30 percent of African American students met the benchmark.
- In math, 27 percent of white students met the benchmark, and only 9 percent of African American students met the benchmark.
- In reading, 41 percent of white students met the benchmark, compared to 18 percent of African American students.
- In science, 21 percent of white students and 6 percent of African American students met the benchmark.
- For all four benchmarks, 15 percent of white students, compared to 4 percent of African American students, met all four benchmarks.

In 2009, the Kentucky General Assembly passed and Governor Steve Beshear signed [Senate Bill 1](#), which focuses the state on improving the college and career readiness of our high school graduates. Governor Beshear has followed up with the [Transforming Education in Kentucky](#) (TEK) Task Force, which will recommend specific strategies to improve the outcomes of our public school graduates. The [Kentucky Board of Education](#), [Council on Postsecondary Education](#) and the [Education Professional Standards Board](#) are all working closely together to improve the student learning outcomes. Many partners in the business community and private foundation community have joined in the call to action.

This week, the TEK Talk community forums held across Kentucky sought the input of citizens for this important work. The eyes of the nation were on Kentucky in 1990, when we were the first state to implement major finance and school reform. The eyes of the nation are once again upon Kentucky as we lead the way in improving the college and career readiness of our public school graduates. No one in the Commonwealth should sit on the sidelines for this major initiative. Thank you in advance for what you will do to support the children and the future of Kentucky.

**September 17, 2010**

### **Adequate Yearly Progress – The Rest of the Story**

Over the last few months, I have been working at the state and national level on developing accountability models for schools, districts and states that might help us replace the existing [No Child Left Behind](#) (NCLB) model called Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP).

While AYP helped us focus on ALL children, the measure had numerous flaws. In Kentucky, we have been developing a new accountability system per requirements of 2009's [Senate Bill 1](#). On September 23, we will release reports that demonstrate our proposed model that focuses on college and career readiness, proficiency, growth and closing gaps. We feel this model is much better than the singular focus on proficiency that NCLB provided. Parts of the following paragraphs come from previous blogs I have written about AYP and will help readers understand my concerns with AYP.

As a baseball player, you want to get a hit every time you bat. What if you got a hit 9 out of 10 times you went to bat, but your stats only listed you simply as a 'failure?' What if your football team won 10 out of 11 games, but you were still told you failed? What if you took a 100-item test and answered 99 items correctly, yet when you received your grade, it's a large, red 'F?'

Sounds ridiculous, doesn't it? That's because it is! However, this is exactly what the No Child Left Behind measure known as Adequate Yearly Progress does to schools.

As an educator, I can't deny that the purpose of NCLB is very laudable. We all want every child to be successful. The measure of AYP was never intended to label schools as failures, nor have teachers felt like they are failures. However, each year around this time, news reports all over the state and nation come out about NCLB and how schools have failed to make the grade or how schools have come up short on the NCLB scale.

While the goal of NCLB is certainly a noble one, the creators of this legislation have failed to properly communicate its true, albeit very complicated, meaning. As Commissioner of Education in Kentucky, I want to help our community better understand this thing called Adequate Yearly Progress.

Every school has something called 'subgroups' of students. These subgroups are defined by the federal government, not schools. Possible subgroups include students with disabilities; African-American students; students who are economically disadvantaged; students who speak, read and write with limited English proficiency; and others. Each subgroup of students must meet both reading and mathematics goals at a level defined by the state. Each subgroup therefore becomes a goal that each school must work to meet.

Some schools have as many as 25 subgroups (goals), and some schools have as few as three subgroups (goals), depending upon the makeup of the school's student population. Schools that

have higher socio-economic levels and less diversity among their students have fewer subgroups and thus have fewer goals to meet.

Schools and districts all across Kentucky are being labeled as failures even though they may reach 80-95 percent of their goals. Ridiculous -- and most parents understand that this is ridiculous. Recent PDK Gallup polls show that the majority of parents and the public do not think NCLB measures have improved schools.

As commissioner, I am extremely proud of the dedication and hard work of teachers and administrators in Kentucky. I am extremely proud of the community partners who are helping our schools reach higher levels of performance. Teachers and staff members deserve a pat on the back and encouragement from the community.

No Child Left Behind is coming up for re-authorization in the next year or so. I encourage all citizens to help teachers and staff communicate to our politicians that we support helping children be successful; however, we need other ways to announce the results of our efforts and the progress, not failure, of our schools. In Kentucky, the requirements of Senate Bill 1 will serve as a model for the nation as we consider reauthorization of NCLB.

October 15, 2010

## College and Career Readiness

Very soon, the [Council on Postsecondary Education](#) (CPE) will release the High School Feedback Report for the graduating class of 2008. The report will be available on the Kentucky Department of Education's (KDE's) [Open House](#) Web page. This report is a valuable tool to help universities, school districts, parents and policy makers better understand the preparation level of our high school graduates.

KDE recently released the first [College and Career Readiness Report](#) for the graduating class of 2010. What are the major differences in the two reports? The CPE report tracks the students from graduation through enrollment in postsecondary and reports students who actually enrolled in postsecondary. The KDE report shows all students who graduated from high school and the college/career readiness of the students. The CPE report shows that about 60 percent of graduates from Kentucky high schools actually enrolled in postsecondary and about 50 percent of those students met CPE benchmarks for college readiness (this includes ACT and college placement tests). The KDE report shows that 34 percent of all 2010 public high school graduates met ACT or career-ready requirements. The two reports show very similar results, with the CPE report showing that about 30 percent of high school graduates were ready for college and the KDE report showing about 34 percent ready for college/career.

ACT recently released a major report on college readiness entitled [Mind the Gaps: How College Readiness Narrows achievement Gaps in College Success](#). This report has three major recommendations.

1. *"Close the gap between student aspirations and high school course plans by ensuring that all students take at least the core curriculum in high school."* The Kentucky Board of Education has established requirements for a high school diploma that include the core curriculum requirements recommended by ACT. The challenge for Kentucky is to ensure course content across the state meets the rigor needed to be successful in college/career. The current work on the common core standards for college and career readiness will establish a framework; however, close monitoring of actual delivery of content will be a local school district issue.

2. *"Close the gap in the alignment of high school courses with college and career readiness standards by focusing high school courses on the essential standards for college and career readiness."* This is the work that KDE is currently leading in eight regional networks across Kentucky. More than 1,000 teachers, principals and instructional supervisors are working closely with college faculty to ensure the alignment of high school and K-8 curriculum to the common core standards for college and career readiness. Kentucky is also one of 12 states working with the [Southern Region Education Board](#) (SREB) to develop curriculum that integrates college and career standards within comprehensive courses of study that will lead to career certifications.

3. *“Close the gap in the quality of high school courses across schools by offering all students rigorous high school core courses that cover the essential knowledge and skills needed for college and career readiness in sufficient depth and intensity.”* The equity of course offerings across high schools in Kentucky will be a major challenge. Small and rural high schools may not have course enrollment, instruction, equipment, materials or other resources necessary for the math, science and other courses that are part of the required core curriculum. The Governor’s Transforming Education in Kentucky Task Force is working on recommendations for virtual delivery and funding models that should help address the equity and access issues.

In the [PDK/Gallup 2010 poll](#), we find that more than 90 percent of parents believe that a postsecondary experience is necessary to ensure a better quality of life. More than 90 percent of 2010 public high school graduates in Kentucky indicate a desire to attend postsecondary institutions. The data from the two reports mentioned earlier show that only 60 percent of graduates actually enroll in postsecondary, and about 50 percent of those enrolling are college/career ready for the postsecondary experience.

By taking the three recommendations from ACT and fully implementing these recommendations in every school district in Kentucky, we can ensure a brighter future for the graduates and for Kentucky.

**December 10, 2010**

### **KBE Takes Historic First Step**

The [Kentucky Board of Education](#) (KBE) began an historic journey this week. The board took the first steps in the approval of the first “next-generation” accountability model in the U.S. based on common core standards that have now been adopted by 44 states.

I thought readers might be interested in the “talking points” I used as the board approved the [goals and guiding principles](#) for the accountability model that were developed in collaboration with the [Council of Chief State School Officers](#) (CCSSO).

(Note: the goals and guiding principals document posted does not reflect the many changes made by the board at its meeting. Staff is working to incorporate those changes now, and the final document will be shared widely.)

### **Events Leading to Proposal for Accountability Model**

- 2009’s [Senate Bill 1](#) passed -- one of the most visionary pieces of legislation in the country.
- Federal [Elementary and Secondary Education Act](#) (ESEA) reauthorization is past due – should have been done in 2007.
- President Barack Obama establishes goal of regaining U.S. leadership among competing nations for percentage of students with college degrees (two- and four-year) – goal is 60 percent ([Speech to Congress](#), 2009).
- U.S. Department of Education and President Obama proposed ESEA reauthorization [Blueprint](#) – spring 2010.
- [Aspen Institute](#) convened discussion on accountability model with House/Senate staff – spring 2010.
- CCSSO Standards, Assessment and Accountability Committee recommends task force to develop next-generation accountability model for ESEA reauthorization – spring 2010.
- CCSSO task force convenes – summer 2010.
- [AdvanceEd](#) and CCSSO team convene discussion on accountability and accreditation – fall 2010.
- CCSSO task force conducts virtual meetings – fall 2010.
- [CCSSO Annual Policy Forum](#) in Louisville provides public access to proposed accountability model – November 2010.

### **Kentucky’s Position**

- First to adopt [Common Core Standards](#) – 44 states have now adopted.
- First to issue a Request for Proposals (RFP) for state assessment based on Common Core Standards – November 2010
- First to implement Common Core Standards – curriculum framework available June 2011, and teachers set to implement in August 2011.

- First to assess Common Core Standards – May 2012.
- Proposed – first to implement accountability model based on Common Core Standards and goal of “college- and career-ready” – August 2011.
- Proposed – first state to gain waiver of adequate yearly progress (AYP) with replacement of systemic approach to meet goal of “college- and career-ready” – submit in January 2012.

#### **Key Comments on Goals of Accountability System**

- We are moving to a more rigorous goal of “college- and career-ready.”
- We are not abandoning the proficiency goal. Proficiency is a predictor of the higher goal of college- and career-ready.
- We have over-identified schools with more diverse student populations while allowing schools with lower achievement levels and less diversity to avoid identification and interventions.
- We are moving from a focus on perfection (AYP) to a focus on continuous improvement (growth).
- We are providing a more transparent reporting system that provides actionable data for students, classrooms, teachers, administrators and school districts.
- We are providing a systemic approach that holds all stakeholders accountable.

#### **Key Comments on Guiding Principles**

- Proposed accountability model is systemic and aligned closely to the KBE’s four strategic priorities of Next-Generation Learners, Next-Generation Professionals, Next-Generation Support Systems and Next-Generation Schools and Districts.
- Model has strong focus on actionable data at all levels of the system.
- Model has focus on building school and district capacity, not simply identification.
- Model compares similar demographics of students, classrooms, schools and districts on a growth model rather than a perfection model.
- Model promotes improvement of the working conditions that impact the learning results.

**January 28, 2011**

**Don't Slow Down on Senate Bill 1**

On January 14, 2011, I sent a letter sent to legislative leaders opposing any moves to slow down implementation of or redirect funding for 2009's [Senate Bill 1](#) (SB 1).

The letter was addressed to Senate President David Williams and Speaker of the House Greg Stumbo. Gov. Steve Beshear, Rep. Carl Rollins (chair of the House Education Committee), Sen. Ken Winters (chair of the Senate Education Committee) and members of the Kentucky Board of Education also received copies of the letter.

I sent this letter to counter calls to slow down implementation and use any funding directed for SB 1 for other purposes.

SB 1 is a top priority for the Kentucky Department of Education and Kentucky Board of Education, because students and teachers need an education system that will prepare children for the competitive world environment. I know of no more important expenditure of funds than to prepare our children for their future.

Senate Bill 1 was passed in the 2009 session of the Kentucky General Assembly and is a comprehensive piece of legislation that addresses many items in the area of public school assessment and accountability. The bill, which revised 14 existing laws and created one new statute, requires that a new system of public school assessment and accountability be implemented in the 2011-12 school year.

Although the bill did not specify funding for implementation, monies in the P-12 education budget have been redirected for that purpose, including professional development funds.

You can see the full letter on this page. Please join me in advocating for steady, strong implementation of this crucial piece of legislation.



**February 11, 2011**

## **College and Career Readiness**

The [Kentucky Board of Education](#) (KBE) has spent considerable amounts of time deliberating the proposed college and career readiness measures that are a component of the Senate Bill 1 (2009) accountability model.

Over the past few weeks, I have read numerous reports concerning the college and career readiness issue and how we as states and the nation must work to improve the readiness of our high school graduates -- or our nation faces loss of productivity and competitiveness. Of course, those of you have been in education for 40 or more years (like me) know that these challenges are not new. This issue has been around since the early 1800s, when [Horace Mann](#) was debating the purpose of schools. What is different now is the alignment of P-12 educators, businesses, government and higher education in promoting the agenda from one of access to opportunities for education to the new goal of universal SUCCESS for ALL children to reach proficiency and be prepared for success.

Some of the publications that I would recommend to readers are:

- *Time* magazine published an excellent group of articles in the January 17, 2011, issue entitled "[Where the Jobs Are.](#)"
- The Harvard Graduate School of Education published *Pathways to Prosperity*, which was released in early February. This report would seem to support the KBE focus on defining not only college-ready, but also career-ready.  
[http://www.gse.harvard.edu/news\\_events/features/2011/Pathways to Prosperty Feb 2011.pdf](http://www.gse.harvard.edu/news_events/features/2011/Pathways_to_Prosperty_Feb_2011.pdf)
- From ACT, Inc. last week, there was *Breaking New Ground: Building a National Workforce Skills Credentialing System*. This report also strongly supports the work of KBE in defining career-ready as well as college-ready.  
<http://act.org/research/policymakers/pdf/BreakingNewGround.pdf>.

Some statistics from the *Time* article caught my attention:

- Detroit currently has a 13.3 percent unemployment rate; however, businesses cannot find mechanical engineers to fill jobs.
- General Electric has a major expansion of jobs at Appliance Park in Louisville that will require postsecondary skills and training for the new "green" refrigeration systems.
- Consulting firm Deloitte is currently scouring college campuses for tax specialists, lawyers and auditors.
- Who is currently out of work? This recession has not impacted all segments of the population equally. The currently unemployment rates are 5 percent for bachelor's degree holders, 10 percent for high school grads and 16 percent for those with less than a high school diploma.

- As the jobs are coming back, they will not be spread equally across all levels of education. More than 80 percent of new jobs will require some education beyond high school whether a one-year certificate or two- or four-year degrees. These jobs will be heavily located in professional/business services, education and health services, and most will have strong technology requirements.
- Who will get the existing jobs? Bachelor's degree holders will get 38 percent; associate degree holders or higher, 10 percent; those with some college, 18 percent; and high school grads will get 26 percent. That means we need about 92 percent of the students who are currently in 8th grade to obtain a high school diploma, and we need at least 68 percent of current 8th graders to achieve education beyond high school.

These statistics highlight our challenges for Kentucky.

1. If we do not do something different in Kentucky, about 25 percent of our current 8th graders will not graduate from high school in 2015. That is more than 12,000 students who will not graduate and will be competing for about 8 percent of the jobs available -- and those jobs will most likely not pay a living wage. We NEED the [dropout prevention bill](#) that raises the compulsory attendance age and provides students with alternative programs and a stronger focus on career and technical education.
2. Currently, we project that only 34 percent or 17,000 of our current 8th-grade class will meet college and career readiness measures. That means our employers will be like Detroit -- they will not have a supply of workers with the skills needed for the jobs available. We have already heard this from the [Chamber of Commerce](#) in northern Kentucky and other business leaders across the Commonwealth.
3. The future of the Commonwealth and the future of our 8th-grade class and all subsequent groups of children is that we need to improve our percentage of high school graduates who are [college and career ready](#) from the current level of 34 percent to at least 65 percent by 2015. That means we need to better prepare at least 17,000 more students in our current 8th-grade class and subsequent groups of students.

We cannot wait until these 8th-grade students become high school seniors. We cannot ignore the students who are currently in high school. We cannot ignore students who are in preschool through 7th grade.

Over the next few months, the Kentucky Department of Education will have a "laser focus" on college- and career-readiness strategies. We will provide one strategy every two weeks that we are either implementing or plan to implement during 2011-12 school year. What is unique about our effort is that we will connect the strategies to the districts, schools, classrooms, teachers, students and parents.

I hope readers will help spread the word that Kentucky is focused on our children's future and the future of our Commonwealth.

**March 11, 2011**

### **ESEA/NCLB: Time for Refocusing**

U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan [testified](#) at the House Education and Workforce Committee this week. He addressed many topics, including budget issues and the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) [reauthorization](#).

One statement he made gained attention from the media. Sec. Duncan said that the U.S. Department of Education was projecting that as many as 82 percent of schools will not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) next year. Many people have questioned this number; however, I believe he is pretty accurate in the projection. Certainly, something must be wrong with a system that labels 82 percent of our schools and districts as failures.

I have written about this issue in several past blogs. (NOTE: See the links at the end of this blog for those postings.) On a few occasions, my support for a rewrite of ESEA has been misinterpreted. Let me be clear that I support high expectations for all students, teachers, principals, school districts and state agencies. Our number-one goal should be student success. No Child Left Behind (NCLB) focused on student success; however, the actual details of implementation lacked equity across the nation.

What I am supporting is a change from the NCLB minimum levels of proficiency for students and schools to a focus on a college and career readiness and a focus on student growth. Kentucky is leading the way in developing an accountability model with these components to replace No Child Left Behind. I have requested that Sec. Duncan review our model. I have worked with the Council of Chief State School Officers' (CCSSO's) committee on [next-generation accountability systems](#) to mirror our state model after the committee's work.

Our proposed model will be reviewed for the final time by the Kentucky Board of Education at its April 2011 meeting. If you are interested in the details of our model, here are several links describing the model and the regulatory language that the KBE will be asked to approve next month.

- [Proposed Accountability Model](#)
- State Regulation 703 KAR 5:200

Finally, let me be clear that no one is trying to avoid the consequences of NCLB. We are trying to build a system that promotes high expectations for ALL children, accountability for students, teachers, principals, districts, and state agencies, and resources/support for all involved.

**April 1, 2011**

## **Priorities for Children Should Drive Education Laws**

Last weekend, I had the opportunity to attend the annual legislative session of the [Council of Chief State School Officers](#) (CCSSO). While in Washington, D.C., I also took the time to meet with legislative staff. The topic of the meeting and my visits to the “Hill” was reauthorization of the federal [Elementary and Secondary Education Act](#) (ESEA), which also is known as No Child Left Behind (NCLB).

I have written many times that the intent of NCLB was powerful; however, we now need to push forward with a focus on college and career readiness that 2009’s Senate Bill 1 required. What is great about our position in Kentucky is that we now are leading the reform effort through our work on the [Common Core Academic Standards](#) and the work on the next-generation accountability model. It was evident in conversations with key senators, House members, legislative staff and other chief state school officers that there is a great deal of agreement on the components that will replace No Child Left Behind.

President Barack Obama has set a goal that the law would be reauthorized prior to the start of the 2011-12 school year. U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan has talked a great deal about the need for reauthorization and the focus on college and career readiness. Sec. Duncan also has projected that 82 percent of schools across the nation will not make adequate yearly progress (AYP) this year and thus be labeled as “failing” schools by local media. In Kentucky, our projection is that 87 percent of school districts and 60 percent of individual schools will not meet AYP this year and will be labeled as failing districts and schools by media.

Let me be clear that no one is wanting to lower standards. The push in Kentucky is to raise standards and raise expectations that ALL children will graduate from high school with the skills needed to be college- and/or career-ready.

Now is the time for action. Principals, superintendents, teachers and parents need to be communicating with their Congressional delegation that No Child Left Behind needs to be reauthorized. The following three points will be most effective:

- While NCLB had the right vision, the details of implementation have not been consistent or rigorous enough across the states.
- A reauthorization of NCLB should set high expectations for college and career readiness but leave flexibility to the states on how to meet the goals and expend funds.
- If Congress does not reauthorize NCLB, then states should be allowed to submit new accountability models for rigorous peer review and approval. The Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) will review a proposed accountability model at its April 13 meeting – see that model on KDE’s [Unbridled Learning](#) page.

The coming months are crucial. At its April and June meetings, the KBE will consider, for approval, the next-generation accountability model. We will need either reauthorization of

NCLB or a waiver of requirements to implement this model, which meets the requirements of 2009's Senate Bill 1.

But most of all, our children are waiting on us to improve their chances for success beyond high school. Thanks in advance for your advocacy.

**April 15, 2011**

### **Transparency: Best-Practice, But Messy**

This week, the [Kentucky Board of Education](#) approved, in a second reading, the first step toward a Next-Generation Accountability Model for Kentucky. The board approved the next-generation student learning components for the accountability model. For more information about the model, visit the [Unbridled Learning](#) page on the KDE website.

This major step did not come easily. Since the passage of 2009's Senate Bill 1, KDE has been working very closely with stakeholders to develop the components of the accountability model. I am certain many stakeholders have felt frustrated or confused at least once during the process. While we are always concerned that there is confusion or frustration, it is our hope that stakeholders understand the need for transparency and two-way communication in the development of the accountability model.

The Kentucky Board of Education, through the Commissioner's Office, utilizes advisory groups to gain feedback on major policy issues. For more information about these advisory groups, check out the recent edition of [Kentucky Teacher](#).

Over the past 12-14 months, we have worked with each of these groups to gain feedback on the proposed accountability model. We have traveled to each educational cooperative on numerous occasions to present and gain feedback from superintendents, principals and teachers.

This process is messy. We would present components of the model one week and get feedback that led to changes the next week. Superintendents would then meet in state-level meetings, and there would be confusion about the latest version of the accountability model. In an attempt to ensure that all superintendents heard the same message at the same time, we moved to a monthly webinar to provide the latest updates and hear concerns from the field.

While the entire process has been very messy with lots of potential for communication gaps, we feel that stakeholder feedback and transparency will in the long run provide the best opportunity for successful implementation of the accountability model. With the KBE action this week, it appears that we are certainly on our way to successful implementation.

Thanks to all of our stakeholders for their patience as we build a system of accountability that will drive behaviors that help more children graduate from high school with the skills needed to be ready for college and careers.

**June 24, 2011**

## **What's the Rush?**

It was another interesting week in Kentucky. Two years of hard work culminated in the release of the Council of Chief State School Officers' ([CCSSO's](#)) guiding principles for next-generation accountability models and the [request](#) by Gov. Steve Beshear that Kentucky be allowed to utilize the Kentucky next-generation accountability model as a replacement for the out-of-date No Child Left Behind ([NCLB](#)) accountability model.

These activities met with a lot of support from teachers and administrators. The activities also were met with some skepticism. One statement that surprised me was a concern from a legislator that we were premature in our request. So, this blog provides a little background on why we are pushing hard to get a waiver approved before the start of the 2011-12 school year.

In April of 2009, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) and Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) began working very diligently to implement 2009's [Senate Bill 1](#). This bill required new standards, new assessments, a new [accountability model](#) and support for teachers. The deadline was the 2011-12 school year.

We have met the deadline with [standards](#) in English/language arts and mathematics, with science and social studies to come online within the next 12 months. We have met the deadline for assessments and the deadline for the accountability model. Over the past two years, we have provided multiple opportunities for feedback from teachers, principals, superintendents, parents and partners. Our work has been guided by the state assessment and accountability council and the national technical advisory panel. The Kentucky Board of Education has held numerous work sessions to receive and provide guidance on the development of the accountability model.

The next-generation student learning component is ready to go and will be implemented in 2011-12. The next-generation instructional programs and support ([Program Reviews](#)) will be implemented in 2011-12, with results from the Program Reviews added to the accountability scores in 2012-13. Next-generation professionals (effective teachers and principals) will be added in 2013-14, dependent on a statewide validity and reliability study.

Parallel to our state work on accountability, CCSSO has been working on Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) [reauthorization](#) and the guiding principles for reauthorization and next-generation accountability models. The Kentucky work informed the CCSSO work and vice-versa. We have been very clear in numerous [blogs](#), [Fast Five](#) e-mails, KBE meetings and stakeholder presentations that our first priority was reauthorization of ESEA; however, if ESEA was not authorized, we would move forward with a waiver request to replace NCLB accountability with the Kentucky model.

The Kentucky model is built upon the key components of NCLB (proficiency, graduation rate and gap). The Kentucky model adds the key components of student longitudinal growth and college/career readiness. The Kentucky model also is very innovative in adding the non-tested areas like art, music, humanities, career studies, practical living and writing through Program Reviews. The Kentucky model is an innovative model that is balanced and more rigorous in expectations than the NCLB model.

The [announcement](#) last week by U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan that he would entertain requests for waiver if Congress was not able to reauthorize ESEA gave us some sense of urgency. When CCSSO announced the release of the next-generation accountability model this week, we believed it was perfect timing for Kentucky to move forward.

In a nutshell – the following provide the basis for Kentucky moving forward with our waiver request:

- Senate Bill 1 required a new accountability model for 2011-12.
- The KBE has approved (after much feedback and discussion) the next-generation accountability model.
- Kentucky educators overwhelmingly support having one accountability model, rather than having both state accountability and national accountability models. Having two accountability models has been very confusing.
- Moving to the Senate Bill 1 accountability model will focus our work in Kentucky on preparing students for college and careers in addition to current focus of NCLB (proficiency and gaps).
- Educators need to know the rules of the game (accountability) prior to the start of the game (beginning of school year).
- The federal NCLB law is clear that states may propose waiver requests. By being early in the process, Kentucky can propose components that make sense in this state, rather than having the U.S. Department of Education establish rigid guidelines.

In March 2010, Kentucky became the first state to adopt the [Common Core Standards](#). The same critics came out then and said our decision was premature and risky. Since that time, 44 states have joined Kentucky in adopting the standards. The same critics have surfaced over the accountability model. They say Kentucky is being premature, and our actions are risky. This week, CCSSO announced that 41 states support the guiding principles upon which the Kentucky model was built.

The eyes of the nation are certainly on Kentucky; however, the topic of interest to me is the goal of increasing the percentage of college/career-ready graduates from 34 percent to 67 percent by 2015. Over the coming weeks, I will be asking our partners and educators across Kentucky to express their support of the next-generation accountability model. It is time for us to present a position of strength. We need to prepare our children for the jobs of the future, and the Kentucky accountability model will do just that.



**July 1, 2011**

### **Activity Moving Quickly on NCLB Flexibility**

This past week, I spent time at the Southern Regional Education Board ([SREB](#)) Legislative Conference. It was my honor to serve on two panels. One panel discussed the “new normal” of higher expectations with less funding, and the other panel discussed the middle grades report that will soon be released by SREB.

Several House and Senate members from Kentucky were in attendance, along with members from the 10 other states that comprise the SREB. Kentucky Senator Jack Westwood chairs the SREB legislative conference. A much-discussed topic during the meeting was Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) [reauthorization](#) and Kentucky’s [request](#) for flexibility, waiver and replacement of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability model.

This week, I also had the honor of serving on a panel sponsored by the [American Institutes for Research](#) and [Education Week](#). The meeting location was the new Capitol Visitors Center in Washington, D.C. The topic of this panel was school turnaround. The meeting was attended by numerous D.C. advocacy groups and key staff with the House and Senate committees that are revising NCLB.

It appears that the House and Senate remain split on how to move forward with reauthorization. In discussions with Senate staff, there is strong support for the Council of Chief State School Officers’ ([CCSSO's](#)) guiding [principles](#) for next-generation accountability systems to replace NCLB. Of course, these guiding principles were the basis for the Kentucky accountability model that was submitted to U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan by Gov. Steve Beshear in our waiver request. On the House side, it appears that Chairman John Kline (R-MN) has a lot of new members on the committee and is moving toward several pieces of legislation to address components of reauthorization. Bottom line – most people in D.C. predict that we will not see reauthorization until after the presidential election in 2012.

This week, NPR [highlighted](#) Kentucky and Idaho as having two different approaches toward NCLB. Idaho, along with Utah, South Dakota, Montana and Nevada, has informed Sec. Duncan of its intent not to “raise the bar” for student proficiency this year as required by existing NCLB legislation. Kentucky has asked for replacement of NCLB accountability with a more rigorous model that promotes student growth and college/career readiness for all students.

While the two may seem at odds, they actually are not. The western states are asking for a method that would keep NCLB relevant. If 100 percent of schools and districts are labeled as “needs improvement” (which will soon happen due to the nature of NCLB legislation), then the law is not relevant. By holding the line at the current proficiency level, these states believe they would keep the law relevant until they develop new accountability models based on the CCSSO principles. The only difference between the two approaches is that Kentucky and other states

(North Carolina and Colorado, to name just two) are ready to propose new accountability models based on CCSSO principles.

Over the next few weeks, CCSSO staff, chiefs from the states and our Kentucky staff will be communicating directly with the U.S. Department of Education to establish expectations and guidelines for the waiver process. My expectation is that Kentucky will have clear direction from the department concerning our accountability model prior to the start of the school year. Stay tuned – events are moving quickly.

July 29, 2011

## Heat Index is Rising on Unbridled Learning

The hot days of July and August have always been a period of excitement for me. As a former high school band director, this was time for band camp and preparation for the upcoming football and marching band season. As a principal, it was time for finalizing schedules and completing the hiring of teachers. As a superintendent, it was time to make certain that school facilities and grounds were ready and that budgets were ready to meet the needs of our students and teachers.

This July and August I am experiencing excitement about the implementation of the Kentucky [Unbridled Learning](#) – College/Career Readiness for ALL plan. This plan is an outgrowth of 2009’s Senate Bill 1 and the Governor’s [Transforming Education in Kentucky](#) Task Force.

The Unbridled Learning – College/Career Readiness for ALL has a metric of increasing the percentage of college/career-ready graduates of Kentucky high schools from the current 34 percent to 67 percent by 2015. We have been communicating this goal and strategies to reach this goal for months. During the

2011-12 school year, we will begin to see the strategies implemented and begin to see if our strategies yield the results for our students.

As I speak to educators, parents and community members across the Commonwealth, I focus on the three key strategies for Unbridled Learning. During the 2011-12 school year, we are implementing the Kentucky Common Core Standards in English/language arts and mathematics. On August 1, we are launching a software [program](#) – the Continuous Instructional Improvement Technology System (CIITS) -- that will provide educators with full access to the standards and resources to support the standards. This software and the resources were developed and aligned based on the work of more than 1,500 educators from Kentucky schools.

Also, we are now providing training and resources for educators in Kentucky that support the new assessments, which are based on the new standards. Just this week, we had educators from across Kentucky working on understanding of the new end-of-course assessments in English II, Algebra II, U.S.

History and Biology. Many teachers will receive training and support over the coming months to gain understanding of the new assessments in grades 3-8 and high school courses.

Finally, the excitement comes from a new accountability [model](#) that goes into place this school year. While we are hoping that Kentucky will be granted flexibility to replace federal No Child Left Behind (NCLB) accountability with the Kentucky accountability model, we will be implementing the Kentucky model either way.

My July/August excitement has not waned as I enter my 40th year of education. If anything, this year is even more exciting. Why? I work with great teachers and leaders across Kentucky who are excited about the future of our children. While the work ahead will be exhausting, and there are never enough resources to do the work, Kentucky educators are dedicated to a singular focus of success for ALL children. If you see an educator over the next few weeks, give him or her a pat on the back and share your wishes for much success in the year ahead.

**August 12, 2011**

### **Movement on NCLB Waiver Requests**

This week, U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan [announced](#) the timeline for No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waiver requests. Sec. Duncan indicated that the preference was [reauthorization](#) of NCLB by Congress, which is four years past due. However, given the dysfunctional nature of Congress, it is very unlikely that relief will come through reauthorization.

While some states are looking for relief, Kentucky is actually looking to implement a more reasonable and balanced system of accountability. The Kentucky General Assembly required this system through legislation in 2009 (Senate Bill 1). The Kentucky Board of Education approved the final [regulation](#) to implement the accountability system at its August 2011 meeting.

For the latest description of the accountability model, click [here](#). For a side-by-side comparison of the NCLB and Kentucky accountability models, click [here](#).

Sec. Duncan announced this week that the U.S. Department of Education (USED) would provide a framework for accountability waivers in mid-September, and states may submit responses to the framework after that date. In Kentucky, we are preparing background information for our response, and I anticipate we will once again be the first state in the nation to submit the paperwork in response to the USED framework.

The USED framework will be very similar to the Race to the Top criteria, and given that Kentucky was a finalist and had unanimous support from school districts and teacher organizations in the Race to the Top application, I feel certain we will be in excellent shape for a waiver. Also, I do not believe there will be any conditions that our superintendents, school boards and teacher organizations would not be able to support.

The key waiver components of college/career-ready standards, use of data, student growth and teacher/principal effectiveness are components of our Unbridled Learning strategic plan. I project the teacher/principal effectiveness component will require states to develop models of teacher/principal effectiveness over a 2-3 year period of time, and we are right on target with that time frame.

In September, we will release the results of spring 2011 testing and the subsequent NCLB ratings and consequences. Last spring, we predicted that more than 85 percent of our districts would not meet the NCLB adequate yearly progress targets and more than 65 percent of our schools would not meet the targets. NCLB loses credibility when we start to see these types of numbers, and our focus in Kentucky has changed from minimum competency on math and reading to a focus on college and career readiness for ALL Kentucky children.

Stay tuned for further developments on the accountability waiver process.

**September 2, 2011**

## **What is Proficiency?**

From the annual National Center for Education Statistics ([NCES](#)) analysis of state proficiency standards compared to National Assessment of Educational Progress ([NAEP](#)) scoring scales:

“NCLB required states to develop their own assessments and set proficiency standards to measure student achievement. Each state controls its own assessment programs, including developing its own standards, resulting in great variation among the states in statewide student assessment practices. This variation creates a challenge in understanding the achievement levels of students across the United States.”

Since 2003, NCES has supported research to compare the proficiency standards of NAEP with those of individual states. The latest report was recently released and is available <http://nces.ed.gov/nationsreportcard/studies/statemapping/>.

What did this year’s report tell us about Kentucky’s and other states’ assessments as compared to NAEP results?

- In grade 4 reading, 35 states have proficiency cut scores that are below the basic cut score on NAEP. Fifteen states have proficiency cut scores between basic and proficient. No state has a cut score for proficient that equals the NAEP proficiency cut score. Kentucky has the 17th-highest cut score on this comparison, and it is slightly below the basic level on NAEP.
- In grade 8 reading, 16 states are below NAEP’s basic level, and 34 states are between basic and proficient on the NAEP scale. No state has a proficiency score equal to or above NAEP proficiency levels. Kentucky ranks 12th among the states, and the Kentucky proficient level is between the NAEP basic and proficient levels.
- In grade 4 math, seven states have proficient cut scores below the NAEP basic level; one state (Massachusetts) has a proficient cut score at or above NAEP proficient cut score; and 42 states are between basic and proficient. Kentucky ranks 22nd and is between basic and proficient.
- In grade 8 math, Kentucky ranks 15th and is between basic and proficient. Massachusetts is the only state with proficient cut scores at or above the NAEP proficient level.

What does this mean? Kentucky’s cut scores for our state assessments are, for the most part, in the top third of states, and when compared to NAEP levels, our cut scores are between basic and proficient levels.

As we implement the new accountability system, the Kentucky Board of Education ([KBE](#)) will set student performance levels for novice, apprentice, proficient and distinguished. The KBE will receive guidance and advice from many groups of stakeholders. Our National Technical

Advisory Panel for Assessment and Accountability ([NTAPAA](#)) and our School Curriculum, Accountability and Assessment Council ([SCAAC](#)) will play key roles.

My recommendation to the KBE will focus on establishing levels that are linked closely to college/career readiness. We have hired experts to establish these levels from 8th grade back to 3rd grade. Our high school end-of-course assessments already have these levels linked to [PLAN](#) and [ACT](#) results.

What does this mean to parents, students, teachers, principals, superintendents and the public? They will see proficiency levels in Kentucky move from 70 percent or higher in many grade levels to proficiency levels more closely aligned to NAEP and college readiness results.

Many states are moving in this direction. Recently, Tennessee took this major step. Virginia, Michigan, North Carolina, Georgia and others are moving to proficiency levels that predict college/career readiness.

This is the right thing to do for our children and their future. The percentages of proficient students may drop, and readers should understand the reasons why. The key will be communication that there are new standards and new expectations, and it will not be appropriate to compare results from the spring 2012 assessment to those from the 2011 assessment. Hopefully, our media representatives will get that message. Now is the time to start the conversation at the state and local levels.

**September 20, 2011**

## **NCLB Waiver Update**

Last week, I had the honor of participating in the announcement of the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) waiver process by President Barack Obama and U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan. Also, I was honored to participate in a media call after the announcement with Sec. Duncan and Georgia State School Superintendent John Barge.

I applaud President Obama and Sec. Duncan for listening to governors, state superintendents, local superintendents, parents, teachers and students who have asked for NCLB flexibility. While we all would prefer that Congress reauthorize NCLB (currently four years past due), we certainly appreciate the President and Sec. Duncan for allowing states to generate innovation and reform to establish higher levels of performance for students, schools and districts.

For interested readers, the U.S. Department of Education has lots of information concerning the waiver process at [www.ed.gov/esea/flexibility](http://www.ed.gov/esea/flexibility). The flexibility and waiver do require states to respond to four major areas – college/career ready standards; differentiated accountability and support; improving instruction and leadership; and state review of regulations to allow local districts flexibility from NCLB requirements.

Thanks to 2009's [Senate Bill 1](#), Kentucky is in a strong position to address these major areas. For over two years, Kentucky has been engaged in developing a differentiated accountability model based on college/career-ready standards and individual student growth. The staff at the Kentucky Department of Education are working overtime to prepare our waiver application, and we believe that Kentucky has an excellent opportunity to meet the requirements for the waiver.

Our timeline for the waiver application is very short; however, we do not anticipate any problems in meeting the deadline. We have to submit by November 14. We will have a statewide webinar on October 19 and meet either face-to-face or through webinars with all advisory groups. Our final draft will be reviewed by our teacher, principal and superintendent advisory groups in late October, and we will provide a public review of our application prior to submission.

I want to assure readers that the waiver process is not an attempt to lower standards or expectations. It is just the opposite. Senate Bill 1 raised expectations to college and career ready for all students AND proficiency for all students. Our waiver request will push for the innovation and flexibility to meet these increased expectations.

As the President stated in his announcement, we cannot wait another generation to get this right. Our children's future and the economic future of our state and nation are dependent upon our improvement in getting more graduates ready for college and career.

**October 28, 2011**

### **The First Step Toward NCLB Flexibility**

The Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) has posted the state's application for flexibility under the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965, which was reauthorized in 2001 as the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) Act.

KDE welcomes public comment on the state's application, which is posted on KDE's Unbridled Learning page, [here](#). Comments and feedback may be sent to [eseawaiverrequest@education.ky.gov](mailto:eseawaiverrequest@education.ky.gov). Comments will be accepted until Tuesday, November 8.

Today's posting marks the culmination of over two years of work by the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) and KDE. Since the passage of Senate Bill 1 in 2009, KDE and KBE have been working with partners across Kentucky and the nation to develop the model for next-generation teaching and learning. Through the adoption of the Common Core Standards, implementation of those [standards](#) in Kentucky classrooms, building of resources to support the Common Core Standards, professional development to support the standards, assessment of Common Core Standards and now an accountability [model](#) that drives the focus on college/career readiness and student growth, Kentucky has led the nation in this important work.

Over the last two years, there have been thousands of manpower hours spent in meeting with partners and key stakeholder groups to develop the model that is the basis for the NCLB waiver request. I wanted to use this blog to let the staff at KDE know what a terrific job they have done in working closely with our partners and stakeholders to develop the model for next-generation teaching and learning. I want to thank the General Assembly for its overwhelming support for the focus on college/career readiness for all students. I want to thank the members of the Kentucky Board of Education for their resolve in developing a balanced model focused on college and career readiness.

I hope readers will take the time to review the waiver application and provide feedback and suggestions.

Our next step is to submit the waiver application by November 14 and then work closely with the U.S. Department of Education in a peer review process to get approval for our model in January 2012. The waiver would begin immediately; however, most flexibility actions would happen after results from the 2011-12 school year.

You can see more details on the process at <http://www.ed.gov/esea/flexibility>.



**December 2, 2011**

**Partnering with the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce on the Three “Es”**

This week, [Kentucky Chamber of Commerce](#) President Dave Adkisson and I started a 10-city tour to promote education improvement in Kentucky. The theme of our tour is that education drives employment, and employment drives the economy.

The future of Kentucky depends heavily on our ability to improve the educational attainment and outcomes for ALL Kentucky children. My comments for the first stop on the tour – Paducah -- may be found [here](#). These comments focus on two major requests for local Chamber of Commerce members:

1. As the state implements more rigorous standards, we will need business and community leaders to clearly support the need for increased rigor and expectations of college and career readiness for all Kentucky children. There will be push-back that the standards are too rigorous and the assessments are too rigorous for Kentucky children and teachers. We must stand united in our expectations.
2. Schools alone cannot accomplish college and career readiness for all Kentucky children. Business and community leader involvement is specifically requested for [Operation Preparation](#). This program is set for March 12-16, 2012 and every 8th- and 10th-grade Kentucky student will meet with an adult volunteer who will advise the student on preparation for college and career. The Kentucky Department of Education will provide training and resources for volunteers. Since there are almost 50,000 8th graders and over 45,000 10th graders, we will need many adult volunteers.

My thanks to Dave Adkisson and the Kentucky Chamber of Commerce for their support of education. Education is the number-one item on the chamber’s legislative [agenda](#) and its strategic [plan](#).

In our visits, we will also talk to local editorial boards and media outlets, and we hope to see extensive coverage of the college- and career-ready expectations and Operation Preparation.

**February 10, 2012**

## **Kentucky's Work Banishes the Winter Doldrums**

It was my honor this week to represent Kentucky at the White House [press conference](#) announcing the states who received the first-round [waivers](#) from No Child Left Behind (NCLB). From the announcement of the waiver process in September, the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) team and partners have worked many hours to prepare and negotiate the waiver and flexibility from the rigid requirements of NCLB. I especially want to thank Mary Ann Miller and staff in the Commissioner's Office for pulling together all the components of the waiver and editing the entire application. Also, I want to thank Associate Commissioners Kevin Brown, David Couch, Ken Draut, Hiren Desai, Dewey Hensley, Felicia Smith and their staffs for the extra efforts in preparing the waiver application.

The waiver process actually began in April 2009 as KDE and partners began to plan for the implementation of 2009's Senate Bill 1 ([SB 1](#)). The goal from the beginning has been to have one accountability system rather than two -- state and federal. Having two accountability systems was confusing to parents and schools. Also, the federal system began to lose credibility due to the details of NCLB.

Since April 2009, hundreds of meetings have been held with all stakeholders to gain feedback on the key components of SB 1 that also ended up being the key requirements of the NCLB [waiver](#). These requirements are adopting new college/career readiness standards, implementing a more rigorous accountability model, implementing support for teachers and principals, and increasing flexibility with funding.

The NCLB waiver will have an immediate impact in Kentucky. This year, teachers and students are working with the new college/career-ready standards in mathematics and English/language arts. Schools and districts are planning for the accountability measures of college/career readiness, cohort graduation rates, student growth, closing achievement gaps and Program Reviews in arts and humanities, practical living/career studies and writing. Teachers and principals are working to develop new models for teacher/principal effectiveness. Educators are now supported by the Continuous Instructional Improvement Technology System ([CIITS](#)) that is the envy of many states. Our partners at the [Prichard Committee](#) and [Kentucky Chamber of Commerce](#) are helping spread the word about the new standards and accountability system.

Over the coming weeks, we will be working with schools and districts to implement the funding flexibility requirements. This flexibility comes at a very important time. State budgets for education have been reduced, and schools/districts will be looking at ways to redirect existing dollars to address the components of Senate Bill 1.

I am very proud to be education commissioner of a state that is leading the nation in education reform efforts. My thanks to Governor Steve Beshear and the General Assembly for setting the expectations in Senate Bill 1 that provided the path to the NCLB waiver and assured Kentucky's position as a national leader in education.

**May 18, 2012**

## **How It All Fits Together**

As schools and districts finish the school year, there are many nervous teachers, principals, superintendents and school board members. The reason is the implementation of 2009's Senate Bill 1, the work of which is now called [Unbridled Learning](#), has become reality.

Quite often when Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) folks are out working with educators in regional meetings, there are many concerns raised about the amount of work to do in implementing Unbridled Learning. We at KDE certainly understand the challenge of doing more with less. During one of our recent leadership team meetings, we discussed the need to communicate how all the pieces of Unbridled Learning fit together. This blog is a brief overview of that.

In any system, there are seven components that interact to produce results. With Unbridled Learning, we are trying to address all seven components.

**1) Expectations** – The Kentucky General Assembly was very clear about expectations for college/career readiness through the passage of Senate Bill 1. We have worked closely with higher education, military, and industry to clearly define expectations for high school graduates, and through the [Common Core Standards](#), we have defined expectations to the kindergarten level.

**2) Clearly defined measures and information systems** – Through our work with higher education, military and industry, we have defined the measures of college and career readiness. Through our [MUNIS](#), [Infinite Campus](#), Continuous Instructional Improvement Technology System ([CIITS](#)) and ASSIST planning software, we have developed an integrated information system that will provide timely and accurate data on how well students, teachers, principals, schools, districts and the state are meeting expectations.

**3) Leadership** – Through the regional [networks](#), we have worked to develop leadership in every district to guide the implementation of Unbridled Learning.

**4) Strategic goals and action plans** – The Kentucky Board of Education has established specific and measureable goals to meet the expectations of Senate Bill 1. Through the ASSIST software, every district and school will have specific and measureable goals tied to college/career readiness, proficiency rates, growth, gaps and graduation. Schools and districts will be able to track the deployment of specific strategies through the ASSIST software.

**5) Processes** – Key process are being developed around the accountability system and the No Child Left Behind (NCLB) [waiver](#). We are working on redefining the learning process through our innovation work. We are working with chief financial officers across Kentucky districts to identify several key support processes where we can improve productivity and efficiency.

**6) Resources** – Through the Teaching, Empowering, Leading and Learning ([TELL](#)) Kentucky survey, we are working to improve working conditions in schools and districts. We are working to define teacher and principal effectiveness. We are working to overhaul our approach to professional development. We are developing an [Innovation Foundation](#) to identify additional sources of revenue.

**7) Results** – Through the Unbridled Learning accountability [model](#), we will track short-term and long-term results from the state level to the student level.

While it often seems like we are asking schools and districts to “do one more thing,” there is a clear plan for how all of the components create a much improved system of learning in Kentucky that helps us reach the vision of every child proficient and college/career-ready. In order to reach this vision, all the components of the system must be clearly defined and aligned.

Over the coming months, KDE will be sharing more communication about “how it all fits together.” As the results from our first year of implementing Common Core Standards, new assessments and the new accountability system start to come in, it will be critical that we look at the parts of the system that are not aligned or missing. Unbridled Learning will most certainly continue to develop as we do this.

**June 8, 2012**

## **Setting Standards and Moving Past Basic Skills**

This week, the Kentucky Board of Education reviewed the steps for the standard-setting of the Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP) system of assessments. (See [background](#) on this item and the related [presentation](#) for more details.) Many readers may think of this as a rather boring statistical process; however, the standard-setting process has significant long-term effects on students, parents, teachers, schools, school districts and the state.

The standard-setting process is necessary due to the implementation of the Kentucky Core Academic Standards ([KCAS](#)) that are based on the Common Core State Standards that were adopted as required by 2009's Senate Bill 1 (SB 1). The implementation of these standards required new assessments (also a requirement of SB 1). With new assessments, states have to go through a standard-setting process to determine cut points for classifications of student results. In Kentucky, we have historically used the terms novice, apprentice, proficient and distinguished (NAPD) as the classifications for students.

In determining the cut points for NAPD for the new assessments, Kentucky is changing from our historical focus on proficiency to a focus on college and career readiness. We will compare 8th-grade students' performance on the college readiness benchmarks for the EXPLORE test to student performance on the K-PREP 8th-grade reading and math. In other words, the proficiency cut score on the 8th-grade K-PREP will be set at a similar level to the percentage of students meeting the EXPLORE benchmarks.

What does this mean for students and parents? For the last 20 years, proficiency scores in Kentucky have steadily improved to the point where, in most grade levels (3-8), 70-80 percent of students receive proficient/distinguished scores. With the new tests, this will change dramatically. For grades 3-8, the percentage proficient/distinguished will drop to between 35 and 50 percent.

Why the big change? The expectation has changed from simply proficient on basic skills to college/career-ready. The analogy I use is one from golf. I enjoy playing golf on occasion, and sometimes I play from the senior tees. My score is usually pretty good, since the course is shorter. However, I have a few friends who like to play from the professional tees, which make the course much longer, and since I do not hit the ball that far, the course is much tougher. So my score gets worse.

That is what we are doing in Kentucky. We are asking teachers and students to raise performance from basic skills proficiency to college/career readiness. We are fully expecting our scores to look worse for a few years; however, we have full confidence that if we provide our teachers and students with the supports they will need, then we will see more students rise to the challenge.

Every parent wants their child to graduate from high school ready to succeed at college/career opportunities. Every teacher, school and community wants more children to graduate from high school ready to succeed. I encourage all readers to not panic when the new assessment results are announced. I hope everyone will rally to support our students and teachers as they work to meet this new challenge, which in turn will improve employment opportunities and have a positive impact on the economy of the Commonwealth and ensure a brighter future for every high school graduate.

**August 3, 2012**

### **Changes in Proficiency Percentages: A State-Level View**

As I have shared in presentations and webcasts over the past few months, Kentucky's adoption of the Common Core Standards in English/language arts and mathematics, coupled with the new Kentucky Performance Rating for Educational Progress (K-PREP) assessments tied to those standards, will lead to proficiency rates among students that are lower than what we've seen previously in the Kentucky Core Content Tests (KCCT).

Staff in KDE's Office of Assessment and Accountability have provided a state-level [look](#) at potential changes in the percentages of students scoring at proficient on the state reading and mathematics assessments.

Although these data represent a broad view of potential dips in proficiency percentages, you also can get a sense of how your high schools will perform by looking at the percentage of students meeting the Council on Postsecondary Education's ACT [benchmarks](#) (18 in English, 19 in math and 20 in reading). The higher the percentage of students meeting those benchmarks, the higher your likely overall rates of proficiency. Grades 3-8 may conduct similar projections by looking at the [EXPLORE](#) proficiency rates. Please remember that the projections are only estimates, and the actual proficiency rates will not be available until results are reported in October.

Science and social studies data are based on the 2007 Kentucky Core Content for Assessment 4.1; therefore, distributions of proficiency will be similar to those in 2011.

We are sending this projected proficiency chart out so that local superintendents, principals and teachers will not be surprised when the actual results are reported in October. As commissioner, I am working to communicate with all stakeholders about these significant changes. Our partners at the [Prichard Committee](#) and the [Kentucky Chamber of Commerce](#) also have been working hard for over a year to communicate these changes.

As local superintendents and principals estimate what their results will be, it is important to remind your teachers, parents, students and community members of a few important points.

- These results cannot be compared to previous results, since we are assessing students on a different standard. The previous standard was basic proficiency on math and reading. The new standard is college and career readiness.
- We made the change to college and career readiness due to the competitive global economy that was the basis of 2009's Senate Bill 1, which required KDE and the Kentucky Board of Education to provide new standards and assessments that are internationally benchmarked.
- The results of the Kentucky assessments are more closely aligned to results from the National Assessment of Educational Progress ([NAEP](#)). Those results report proficiency at

a much higher level than most state tests. Being proficient on NAEP is similar to our new college- and career-ready proficiency. One could say that proficiency on NAEP and the new K-PREP is similar to getting a B or B+ and being advanced/distinguished is similar to an A.

Our intent in raising the standard is to help more students prepare for a competitive employment atmosphere. Currently, we project that over 60 percent of jobs in the future will require some training beyond high school. This means that students must be better prepared for college-level work and career-entry requirements. We should not dwell on trying to compare previous years' data with the new results. We should focus on what we need to do to help more students be competitive, which means Kentucky will be more competitive.



**October 5, 2012**

### **Getting Ready for the Numbers**

The work done over the past three years by legislators, staff at the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE), teachers, administrators, school staff, students, parents, community members and education partners will start to bear fruit soon. Next week at the Kentucky Board of Education meeting, I'll share some estimates of state-level performance connected to the Unbridled Learning assessment and accountability system. School districts are reviewing their data closely, and in a few weeks, district- and school-level data related to the system will be released publicly.

This work began before I accepted the post of commissioner of education, with the passage of 2009's Senate Bill 1. From the very earliest discussions and plans for a new system, a primary goal was to involve as many groups and individuals as possible and to communicate the work broadly. I believe these efforts have been very successful.

Although it's a challenge to communicate information about new test scores and accountability categories before we have data in hand, we've engaged in a series of activities over the past 12 months to reach out to the audiences that will be impacted by and interested in the data.

I and other KDE staff have visited the state's educational cooperatives and presented information on the upcoming data release. We've produced parent-friendly brochures and FAQs on the system and shared those widely. KDE's flagship publication, [Kentucky Teacher](#), has featured assessment and accountability in many stories. Our advisory groups have included discussion about the new system on their agendas. I recently hosted a webcast targeted at reporters and editors who will be covering the results of the new system.

Behind the scenes, KDE staff are involved in projects like designing the new School Report Card, which will be our primary vehicle for sharing the new data. Cross-agency teams are ensuring that staff in each office is kept up to date on the latest developments related to Unbridled Learning. We're even redesigning the agency's website to make it easier for visitors to find information.

We realized early on that KDE could not communicate about this ongoing work without the help of our partners, who have contributed their time, staff and energy to sharing information.

The Prichard Committee's [ReadyKentucky](#) initiative, the [Kentucky Chamber of Commerce's](#) summer speaking tour, the chamber's Business Leader Champions for Education [initiative](#), the discussions at the state's educational cooperative meetings, the Kentucky School Boards Association's (KSBA's) [video](#) on how to talk to the media about test scores and accountability, and the work in our school districts to prepare local communities and media outlets for the coming data release have been vital to spreading the word about the Unbridled Learning system.

All of this is in preparation for what will be the start of a new era in Kentucky public education; a time during which we will focus on the ultimate goal of college and career readiness for all students. These data are crucial to planning and improvement – for our schools, districts and this agency – and providing information about what it all will mean is a shared effort.

**November 2, 2012**

### **Educational Progress Worth Celebrating**

Sometimes when we're in the midst of the hard work of improving schools, it is easy to forget how far Kentucky has come.

The state – all of us – has invested in better schools in the past two decades. And the investment is paying off in students who are better prepared than they have ever been.

Over the past 20 years, Kentucky has moved to the middle of states in academic achievement. We're continuing to move upward. At the same time, other states that didn't focus on schools like we did have moved steadily downward.

Kentucky's progress is worth celebrating. Our educators deserve considerable praise for their effort, as do our elected leaders for staying the course on better schools.

But that course is getting tougher. While our students have been achieving far more, and while they look better when compared to students in other states, the rest of the world has not stood still. Indeed, students in a number of other countries have been achieving at far higher rates than students in the United States.

The world for our students is much different than it was just a few years ago. To be competitive for today's jobs, young adults will have to command as much knowledge and skills as their peers not just in other states but those in other countries.

Today's economy is global. What happens around the world – from energy prices to interest rates to technology breakthroughs – affects us quickly here. The Kentucky coal that used to be sold in our region now moves across the world; indeed, a new deal will ship \$7 billion of Kentucky coal to India.

These days, the best predictor of individual economic success is the quality of his or her education. None of us has lived in a time where education has been so important, not just to individuals but also to communities and states. At least in Kentucky, we have come to understand and act upon that reality. This is why the state has adopted higher academic standards for our students and new tests to measure their progress.

Our goals have increased to reflect that new international reality. Instead of demanding proficiency in just the basics of education, we're now expecting to get students to be ready to keep learning beyond high school; to have the knowledge and skills that make them ready for college or today's workplace.

Our students are as smart as any in the world, and we are now expecting more of them. We didn't do it arbitrarily. We did it because these are the standards of the world and we want Kentucky students to be competitive.

Now that we've released the first results from our new tests, we're seeing that we have a ways to go. The numbers of students who had been distinguished or proficient went down. This isn't because they aren't making progress, it is because we are measuring them against higher standards. We've raised the height of the basket, lengthened the football field, made the golf course longer, pushed back the outfield fences.

It would certainly be more enjoyable for me to keep the tests the way they were and see more Kentucky students get higher scores. It also would be wrong. We do our students no favors when we tell them they are ready to succeed in the world when they are not.

And we want them to succeed.

We expected the test scores to be lower, and we've been saying so. But the scores are jarring nevertheless to students and their parents, to teachers and principals, to taxpayers and to elected officials.

The new test scores can't be compared to the old ones; they measure different things.

But we know that we are making the kind of progress that matters – more of our students are leaving high school better prepared to succeed in the world. Our remediation rates in higher education are getting lower. Our ACT scores are steadily moving upward. We have moved increasingly closer to the national average, and I suspect we will surpass it in a few years if we continue to stay focused.

The scores we've released this week are lower than we want, but readiness is going up. And that is something Kentucky should be quite proud of.

**November 9, 2012**

## **Improvement in College and Career Readiness**

In 2011, I [challenged](#) all superintendents and school board chairs to sign the Commonwealth Commitment to College and Career Readiness. Prior to this, Council on Postsecondary Education ([CPE](#)) President Bob King had gotten the support of every public and private postsecondary president to also sign the commitment.

We had similar success in that all 174 superintendents and board chairs signed the commitment. We then began publishing the percentage of Kentucky graduates who met the CPE benchmarks for college/career readiness (CCR) with the class of 2010. The first report showed 34 percent of Kentucky graduates met the CCR benchmarks.

Fast-forward to the most recent release of CCR rates, and we find more than 47 percent of graduates met the CCR benchmarks. This is remarkable progress and means a lot to graduates and their families.

The average size for a graduating public school class in Kentucky is estimated at 42,000. Using this estimate, we had 14,280 graduates who met CCR benchmarks in 2010, and we had 19,740 graduates meet CCR benchmarks in 2012. This means over 5,400 more students graduated ready to enter credit-bearing courses at any of our postsecondary programs or enter careers that pay a living wage. This represents a huge savings for students and families of over \$5 million that they will not have to pay for remediation and developmental courses that do not give college credit.

This blog serves to highlight the early success of the Unbridled Learning accountability model. I want to provide recognition to those students, parents, schools and districts that are leading the way with CCR.

### **Top Ten Districts for CCR Percentages**

|                    |       |
|--------------------|-------|
| Beechwood Ind.     | 88.8% |
| Ft. Thomas Ind.    | 70.2% |
| Hancock County     | 68.8% |
| Hickman County     | 77.6% |
| Oldham County      | 70.6% |
| Paintsville Ind.   | 74.1% |
| Pikeville Ind.     | 68.8% |
| Walton-Verona Ind. | 79.8% |
| Williamstown Ind.  | 79.7% |

### **Top Ten Districts for Growth in CCR Percentages**

|                |                     |
|----------------|---------------------|
| Augusta Ind.   | 33.7-point increase |
| Clinton County | 32.8-point increase |

|                    |                     |
|--------------------|---------------------|
| Cumberland County  | 32.3-point increase |
| Danville Ind.      | 27.3-point increase |
| Eminence Ind.      | 34.7-point increase |
| Fleming County     | 25.7-point increase |
| Lee County         | 25.3-point increase |
| Paintsville Ind. 2 | 9.1-point increase  |
| Pulaski County     | 26.8-point increase |
| Wayne County       | 33.7-point increase |

Congratulations to these districts. I also want to recognize the overall growth in CCR of the vast majority of our districts. This year, 100 districts met their CCR goals, and 46 districts improved by over 10 percent.

Check out the CCR [map](#), and make certain to give a pat on the back to those schools and districts who are helping more students be prepared for their future.

**November 16, 2012**

### **Taking Stock of Unbridled Learning Results**

The Unbridled Learning accountability results have been out for a few days now, and we are seeing lots of articles, board presentations, parent workshops and discussion about the accountability results.

Early reports seem to focus on the overall drop in proficiency (which was predicted) and the new emphasis by the state to provide a percentile rank for schools and districts. However, there has not been much discussion about the significant [increase](#) in the percentage of graduates who are college- and career-ready. This is somewhat disappointing, since college and career readiness is the underlying principle for the accountability model and was the key requirement from 2009's Senate Bill 1.

Other key issues we are hearing about include the usefulness of the tools provided. While there are massive amounts of data in the new [School Report Card](#), schools are reacting very positively to the data being in one place and the user-friendly nature of the School Report Card. The report card gives a quick and easy snapshot of performance of schools and districts and also provides a multilevel, complex view of the components that make up the overall score for schools and districts.

The percentile rank system has been well received by most, since it provides an easy way to understand how your school/district performance compares to other Kentucky schools. This percentile system is similar to what parents receive from testing reports. Parents may not understand the test score from the state or national test; however, they do understand and want to know how their child's performance compares to other children across the state and nation.

The release of the accountability model has also given the Kentucky Department of Education (KDE) an opportunity to receive constructive feedback on concerns with the model. Among these concerns are:

- complexity of the system
- science and social studies scores -- too high, compared to math and reading
- comparisons with national assessments
- understanding student growth
- understanding student gap group results
- perceived lack of consequences for low-performing schools

KDE will share these concerns and others as we present the Unbridled Learning accountability results to the Kentucky Board of Education (KBE) at the December board meeting. Most of these concerns can be addressed by clarification of the model and how the results are reported.

There will be those that call for immediate action to address concerns. I want to close with some of the state and national issues that will certainly impact any immediate or long-range changes to the model.

The Kentucky Board of Education has certainly stated a clear intent to improve the accountability model as we get feedback from the field. The first issue we must consider is that schools and districts entered the 2012-13 school year knowing the "rules of the game" for accountability, and we should not change the rules in the middle of the game. Therefore, I would recommend to KBE that no major changes be made to regulations governing the model until we have at least two years of data from the model. Also, we are governed by the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) waiver, and any changes to our accountability model would require federal review. Finally, all states are hoping for reauthorization of ESEA (No Child Left Behind), which most certainly will impact the Unbridled Learning model.

As we close out November, parents across Kentucky now know if their child is on target to be college- and career-ready. From 3rd grade through 12th grade, every student and parent has the information to know the status of a trajectory to reach college/career readiness by graduation. This information provides students, parents and educators with the information needed to take action to ensure more of our students reach college/career readiness and have a positive impact on the economy of Kentucky.